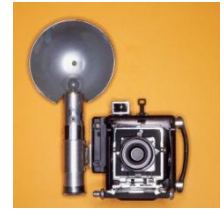


Reno Police Department – Snapshots of our History



This article contains excerpts from “Our First One Hundred Years” – 1864-1964, By Lt. Robert Cavakis and Policewoman Peggy Patchen and also “How Reno Went to the Dogs” by Samuel G. Chapman – Nevada Historical Society Quarterly, Winter 2002, Vol. 45. Photos are courtesy of past & present employees and their families. Additional photos were found in our archives. Our intent is to continue showing small snapshots of the history of the Reno Police Department and its men and women. Additional photos, articles, or memorabilia will be graciously accepted at the Reno Police Department Main Station – 455 E. 2nd St, Reno, NV 89502.

Established in 1864, the Reno area (then called Lake's Crossing) did not have an established police department. If a crime occurred, the few residents handled it at the time. Mr. Myron C. Lake, who developed the small community, sold 80 acres of land to the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR) in 1868. Once CPRR built the railroad station, the Construction Superintendent Charles Crocker decided to name the community after Major General Jesse Lee Reno, a Union Officer killed in the American Civil War. Land lots were auctioned and within two weeks, 100 houses had been built. West Street bound the city limits on the west, Truckee River on the south, East Street on the east, and 4th Street on the north. With the influx of people to the area due to mining, farming, and the railroad, the crime rate increased. Most of the criminal activity was dealt with by the residents of Reno. At the time, the only sheriff in the area was in the Carson City region.



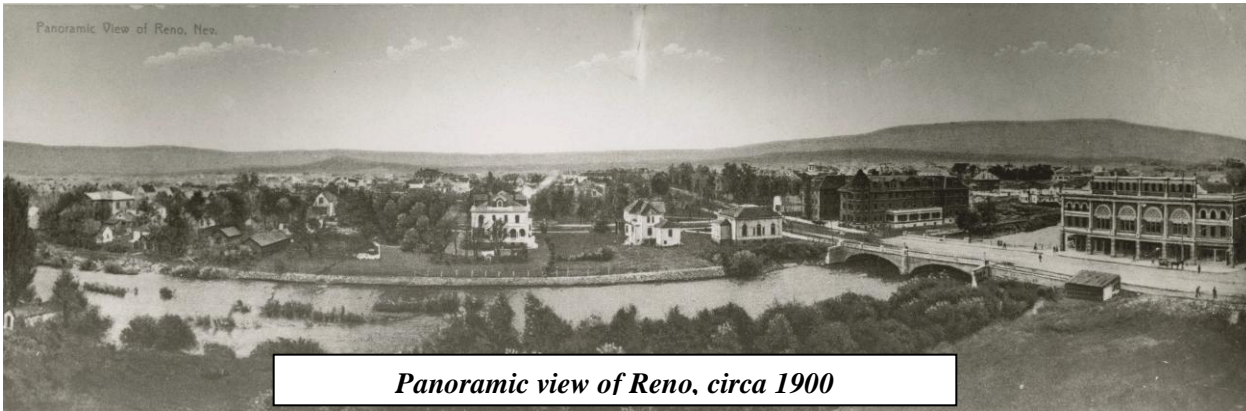
Chief R.C. Leeper

Due to great losses from pilfering and fires, in 1877, it became necessary to form a Fire Police Unit. This unit not only fought fires but made arrests. However, as the city kept growing, crime increased.

Reno's first laws began to originate in 1878. People could no longer throw trash onto Virginia Street; they could no longer sleep on Virginia Street; and dirty water could not be dumped into the street. One reporter went so far as to quip that between the dirty water and the vegetables being dumped onto Virginia Street, it made a good soup.

As the years passed, the citizens of Reno needed elected officials to enhance the quality of governance and community. The city incorporated on May 11, 1903 and the Council had its first meeting. After creating new laws, it became obvious that a police force was needed to protect the community and keep the peace in accordance with a budding new city. The Council appointed Reno's first Chief of Police, Charles Leeper.

As Reno grew, new developments brought new issues such as traffic problems, accidents, racing in the streets, pilfering, robberies, etc. As arrests were made, Reno began to hold more and more prisoners thus the need for a new city hall and jail was requested. The funds were provided and a city hall with jail facility was erected on the northwest corner of First Street and Center Street in August 1906.



Panoramic view of Reno, circa 1900

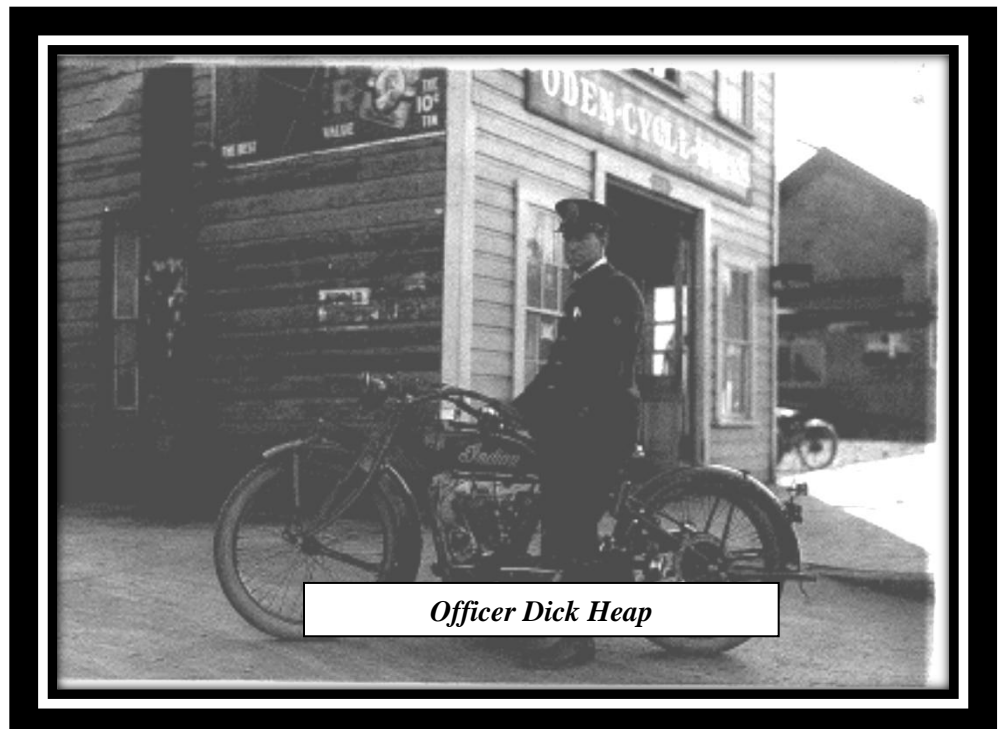
As the community of Reno developed, there was a need for some form of an Identification (I.D.) Unit to aid in clearing up the burglaries that were taking place. In 1910, the Police Department formed its first I.D. Unit. This unit included taking fingerprints and comparing them against prints found at crime scenes. Charles R. Hillhouse was the Supervisor of I.D. He slowly added new equipment and a new records system. By 1928, it was said that the Reno Police I.D. Unit ranked with any bureau in the western states.

In the late 20's, Harley Davidson Motorcycles were introduced to the Reno Police Department. The first two officers to ride them were Bill Deal and Earl Berry.

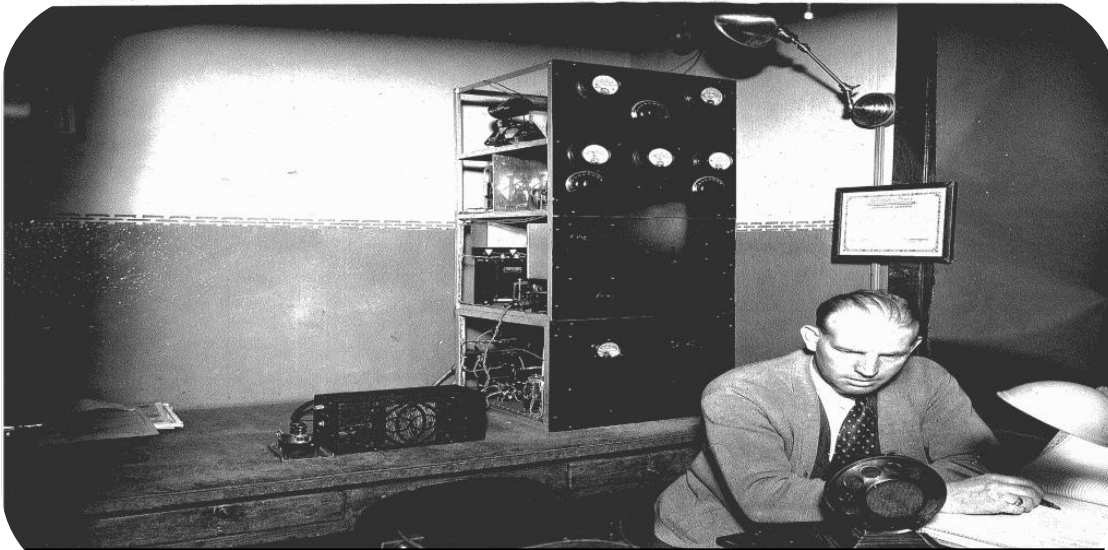
By the 30's, squad cars arrived, however, there was no means of communicating with these cars. Someone had the bright idea that this issue could be resolved by utilizing the local radio station. The radio station they used was KOH. When a police car was needed, a call was made to

KOH. KOH would then call it over the air and if the officer was in the car, he heard the call. This out-of-the-box thinking was great but it left the police department waiting and wondering if the officer in the car received the call. Additionally, it put the work and burden on the radio station.

In 1934, the police department obtained its own radio station. Radios were installed into the cars by Al Kees in April of that year. Reno's radio station at that time was KGHM. Dispatchers would call the radio station and a bulletin would be broadcast. Anyone tuned into KGHM could hear what was going on in the community.



Officer Dick Heap



Dick Heap and the first RPD, two-way radio. California licensed for operation as Nevada was not licensing radios at that time.

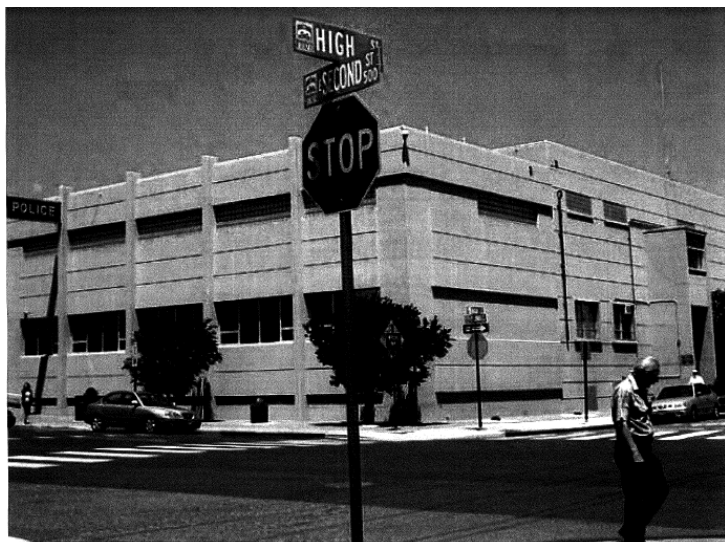
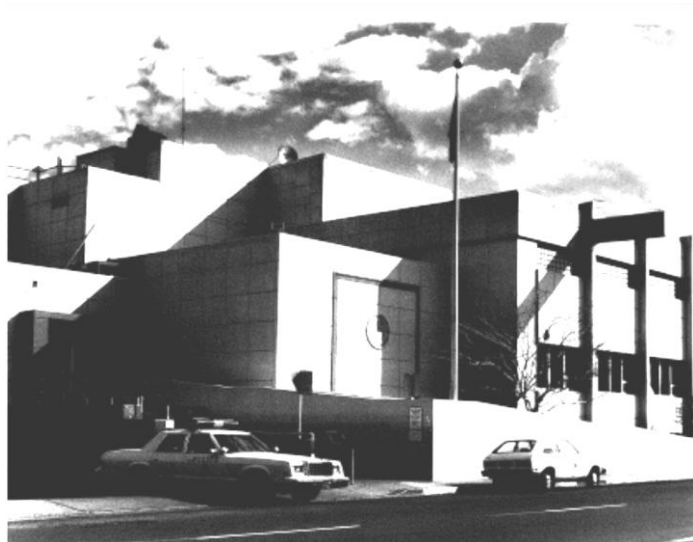
In 1938, the first two-way radio was installed into units. Arthur Sowle who later became the Captain in charge of Communications installed these.

The increasing size of Reno meant an increasing amount of crime. More people were moving in and tourists were beginning to venture further away from their homes on trips as the highways and autos improved. RPD was steadily growing and improving its work force and equipment. As the years rolled by, there was a need for a new city jail.



Reno Police Department, Circa 1935-1939

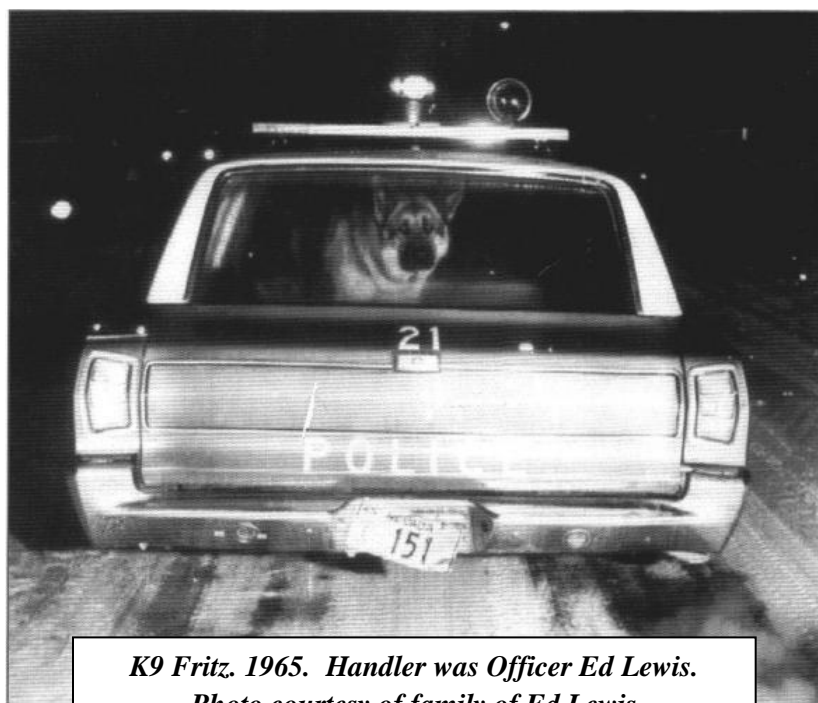
After much deliberation and expenditures, the new city jail was built in January 1950 at Second Street and High Street. The police department moved in. At the time, it was thought that the new building had plenty of room to take care of the continuously increasing criminal activity. Little did they know that 'little ole Reno' would continue to boom, and by 1964, all the extra room were taken up! There was an urgent need to increase the size of the police department building, its workforce, and equipment.



Reno Police Department Building – Then and Now

The New Year's Eve Riot of 1961 led Reno Police Chief Elmer Briscoe to recommend that the police department implement a Canine Unit to help control crime. Reno Mayor Bud Baker backed Chief Briscoe's proposal, as did the *Nevada State Journal*. In an editorial, the newspaper declared "the use of dogs in law enforcement here should be given the most serious consideration."

At the brawl's peak, some fifty police officers were involved in the pitched battle facing about 1,000 rioters and bystanders. Police availability elsewhere in Reno was almost non-existent. At that time, the department was comprised of 134 personnel, 106 of whom were sworn members. Captain Robert Peel observed, "We had a couple of men at each end of town, and the rest were at the riot." To meet the challenge of riot control, Chief Briscoe recommended eight German Shepherd Dogs and handlers be trained and on the job by late 1962 in time for the coming New Year's Eve. He also wanted more dog-handler teams ready for the following year. The Chief's plan for a Canine Unit had strong backing in the community, from the Mayor and other city officials; as well as, from the media.



*K9 Fritz, 1965. Handler was Officer Ed Lewis.
Photo courtesy of family of Ed Lewis*

The Reno Police Department implemented its Canine Unit in June 1962. Initially, the unit was composed of one dog and its handler. The department soon added four additional dog-handler teams and by the summer of 1964, the Canine Unit had grown to nine dog-handler teams.

This is just a snapshot of Reno and the past 100 years from 1864 to 1964. So much more could be written but we had to start somewhere. Thanks to all of those wonderful people who saved old photos, memorabilia, articles, etc. It is our hope that we will soon be exhibiting RPD memorabilia throughout the station and updating the history page with new and exciting tidbits of RPD history on a more regular basis.